

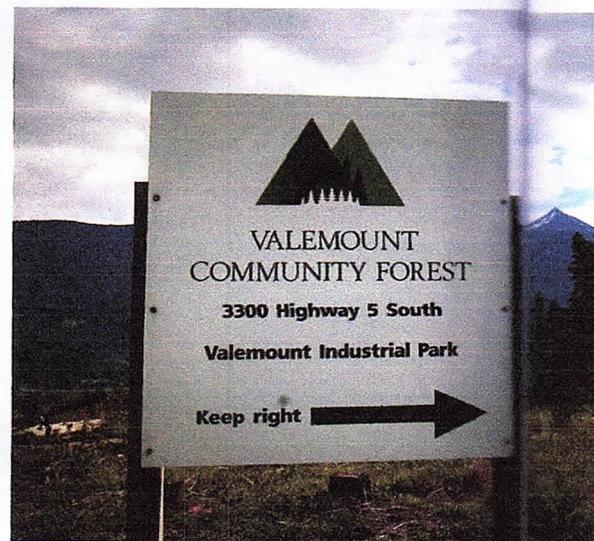
# PERSEVERANCE PAY

## for B.C. sawmiller



*Thanks to a wood supply agreement with the Valemount Community Forest, Jason Alexander (above) now has a stable source of wood, and that has given him the confidence to expand, and move ahead with a post and rail operation for Cedar Valley Holdings.*

Perseverance has paid off for sawmiller Jason Alexander, with his cedar operation in Valemount, B.C. now having a new wood supply agreement, allowing him to expand the operation, and employ more local people.



### By Paul MacDonald

Jason Alexander is one heck of a determined sawmiller—and he's got the track record to prove that.

Alexander owns and operates Cedar Valley Holdings Ltd, a western red cedar shingle producer in Valemount, B.C. Over the past decade—and then some—Alexander has struggled to get enough fibre to keep his employees busy, and to keep product headed out the mill gate.

But things have changed for the positive for Cedar Valley recently on the wood supply side—so much so that Alexander has recently started up a post and rail operation, and hired additional employees.

And the business now has a new building to handle the additional production. The building was built on the site of a long-shuttered dimensional sawmill, on land that is now owned by the Valemount Community Forest.

The community forest has signed an agreement to provide Cedar Valley with a guaranteed 5,000 cubic metres a year for the next 20 years. That may not sound like much volume if you are a large sawmill, but for Cedar Valley, it provides them with a stable source of wood, and has given them the confidence to expand, and move ahead with the post and rail operation.

But it's been a very long, and often

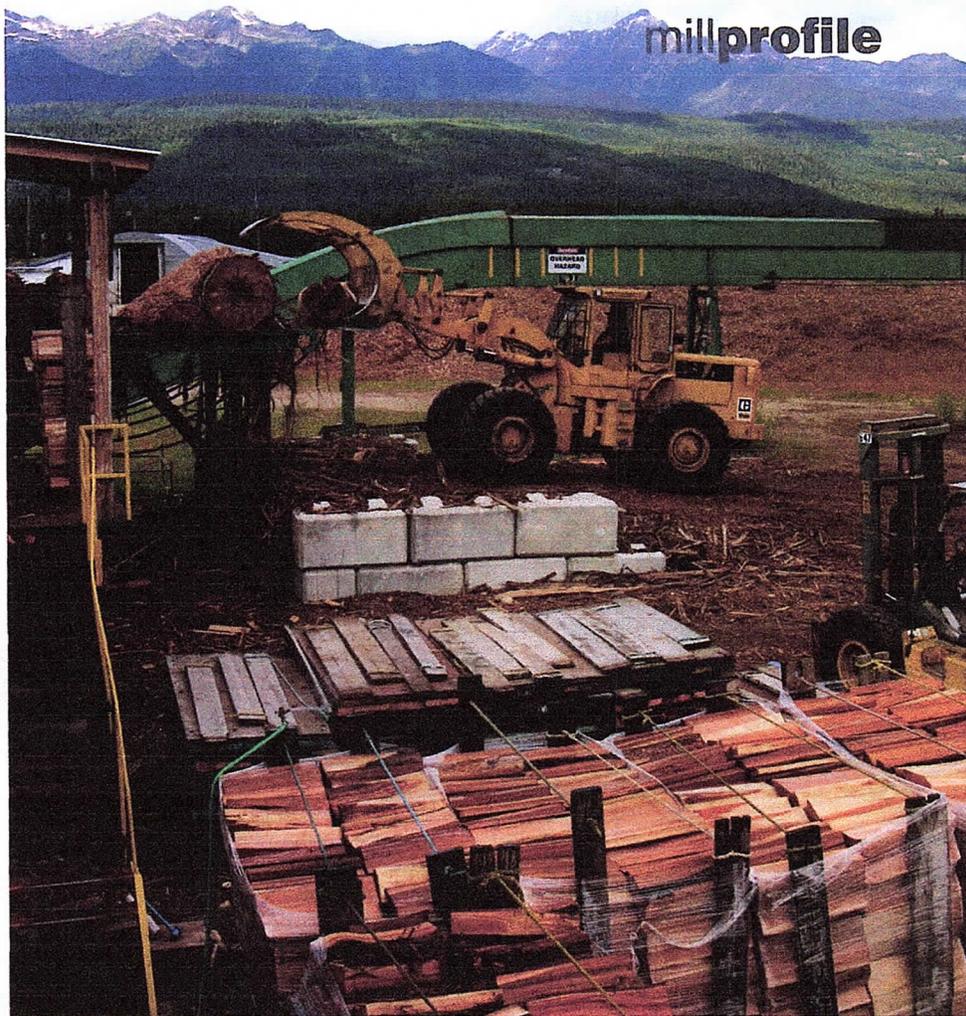
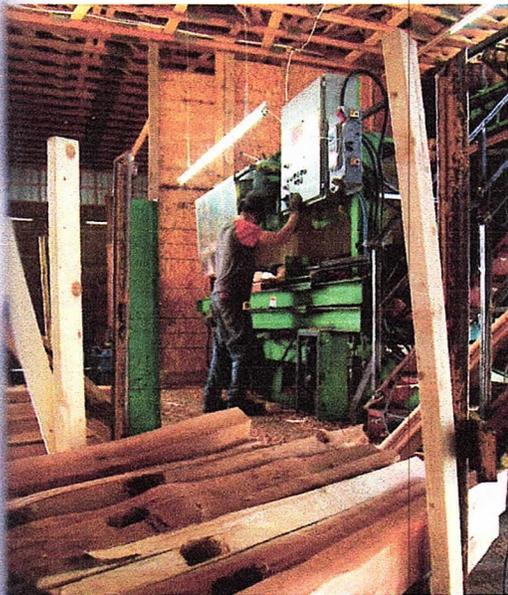
difficult, road since Alexander moved to Valemount in 2000, and set up a modest cedar shingle operation.

It's no surprise that Alexander is involved in this part of the forest industry. He started work at his father's shingle operation in the Fraser Valley, Golden Ears Shingle, when he was a teenager, and his grandfather logged in the Fraser Valley. The Fraser Valley, around the Mission area, is truly the Mecca for western red cedar shake and shingles, with many operations in the region.

"I've been involved in this business for quite a while," says Alexander.

"I don't know what it is about the cedar business, the love of the wood, the

# DAYS OFF



millprofile

*Valemount, B.C., has a spectacular geographical setting, being situated between the Rocky, Monashee, and Cariboo Mountains. But it can be a challenging place to operate a mill since it's some distance away from major service centres, such as Kamloops and Prince George.*

the wood and sawed it on a Streifel machine, and my wife Brianne packed the shingles."

Their biggest challenge, from the get-go, was sourcing a steady supply of wood, in spite of the presence of large amounts of cedar in the surrounding forests. "We struggled for fibre for years—it was really a hand-to-mouth existence for us," says Alexander. "It got to the point that at times we were down more than we operating."

"We've got a great mill here—but it's nothing without a wood supply, to keep it going," he added.

At times, he was trucking in wood from as far away as Terrace and Salmon Arm, to keep the operation working. "It was very costly," he says. "I could only do so much of that. But the extra wood kept the guys working."

Working with the community forest, he also did some log trading. Such deals, although they did not provide a long term source of wood, also helped to keep the mill going.

What helped spur things along for Cedar Valley, though, was the wood agreement struck with the Valemount Community Forest, which has a good amount of timber in the area. And it's added to that in recent years. In early 2016, the community forest purchased a forest licence from Carrier Lumber. The community forest now has two community forest licenses and a small forest licence, with a total annual cut of about 70,000 cubic metres.

The Valemount Community Forest also purchased 240 acres of land at the former Carrier Sawmill site in the town, where it has built an industrial park. It's hoping to attract mill-related and wood products related businesses to the park. Cedar Valley re-located to the park about a year ago.

Putting together Cedar Valley's manufacturing operation involved a great deal of resourcefulness on Alexander's part. He was able to pick up some equipment

characteristics of the cedar itself. I really could not put my finger on one thing." It's pretty clear, though: western red cedar is pretty much in his DNA.

When Alexander was still down in the Lower Mainland, he noticed that cedar blocks from the Valemount area were being trucked down to his father's operation.

So it was a business opportunity for a cedar shingle mill that brought him to Valemount, about three hours southwest of Prince George.

Alexander started out with a modest operation.

"When we came up to Valemount, we were pretty small," he explains. "We had one small shingle machine. I hand-bucked

to page 12

# millprofile

from page 11

from Carrier Lumber, which still had some limited machinery still on site.

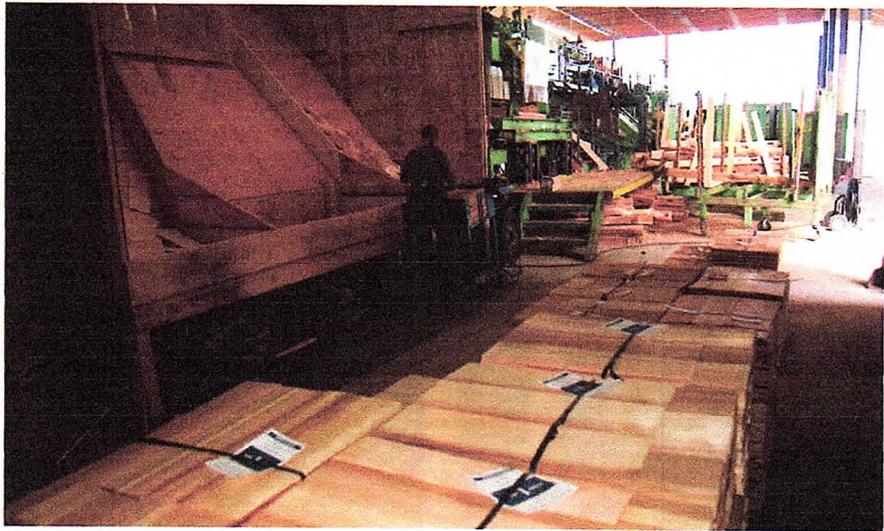
The dimensional mill had gone through a few hands. Forest giant Canfor used to have a sawmill on the site, but it sold the operation to Northwest Specialty Lumber in 2005. It operated the mill for several years. Prince George-based Carrier Lumber then purchased the mill, but never operated it.

Alexander also picked up some equipment from the McBride Forest Industry veneer plant, and post and rail equipment from TRC Cedar, two businesses in nearby McBride, that had shut down.

As mentioned, their shingle machine is from Striefel Industries, of Maple Ridge, B.C. The log deck cut-off saw is from L&M Equipment. They use Cannon bars on the cut off saw. The shingle saw grinder is an Armstrong #25, and they have a Dinasaaw T-Rex automatic chain sharpener. On the post and rail side, it's all custom, either built by Cedar Valley or acquired from TRC, which had the equipment custom-built.

Alexander travelled to a lot of equipment auctions, buying a lot of used iron. He says it has been a bit of a battle at times meshing all this equipment from an assortment of mills so it works productively. "It has been a challenge," he says. "That explains the addition."

They had a pretty constricted work area, but have recently expanded with an 80 by 70 feet building that easily accommodates the post and rail, and shingle operation. "Originally, we weren't thinking about going in that big on the post and rail operation, but when we were able to get more equipment from TRC Cedar, we put it in, and found we were quickly out of space."



**Cedar Valley Holdings had a pretty constricted work area, but it has recently expanded with an 80 by 70 feet building that easily accommodates the post and rail, and shingle operation.**

Alexander has now successfully wrangled all that iron into place. Having worked for his father's business in Mission, he knows the cedar business—and the equipment involved—inside out. "I'm really the hands-on, how best to utilize the log side guy," he says.

He said that Robert Johnson from McBride, of Real Tree Wood Products, has been invaluable during the build. Alexander said Johnson is a talented old school millwright with a terrific knack for working with what's he's got in front of him.

Truly a bonus in terms of overall wood utilization in the region is that Cedar Valley uses some pretty rough wood, with splits and cracks, to make its posts and rails. It is essentially using cedar that would not be suitable for producing shingles, or lumber, for that matter, and adding value to it.

Initially, Alexander was thinking that he

would simply stockpile and sell the post and rail logs he was getting as part of his agreement with the community forest. "But we could not come up with a market for those logs, so we decided to produce the posts and rails ourselves."

And since they are now making use of those logs, it also means another revenue source for the loggers producing that wood, outside of the community forest.

"In addition to working with what we have, we are now actively pursuing and sourcing post and rail logs," he explains. "It really makes a difference for the logger and the tenure holder, seeing the value in that cedar being put on a truck and sent to us, rather than going through all the work of logging it, and then seeing these low grade logs go into a burn pile."

to page 14



# WOOD HOGS

SALES  
PARTS  
SERVICE

Join us at  
International  
Biomass  
Conference  
& Expo  
Booth 301

FOR OVER 40 YEARS RAWLINGS HAS OFFERED A COMPLETE LINE-UP OF THE MOST PRODUCTIVE AND COST EFFICIENT WOOD GRINDERS AVAILABLE

VERTICAL & HORIZONTAL MODELS AVAILABLE

WWW.WASTEWOODHOGS.COM | 1-866-ROCWEAR (762-9327)





**The Valemount Community Forest purchased 240 acres of land at the former Carrier Sawmill site in the town, where it has built an industrial park. It's hoping to attract mill-related and wood products-related businesses to the park. Cedar Valley re-located to the park about a year ago.**

from page 12

The agreement Alexander has with the Valemount Community Forest gives him control over the cedar in the blocks, and who logs it. He works with local logger David Craig, whom Alexander praises. Craig gets into the steep ground, and also has plenty of experience at hand falling, when it's required, he says.

Cedar Valley does a fair bit of trading with its wood supply, though that is not new.

Gilbert Smith Forest Products, a major cedar mill to the south in Barriere, has been a big trading partner with the company for a number of years. "I've worked with Gilbert Smith and traded with them for years, but it wasn't enough wood.

Now with my own wood licence, and the extra volume from that, it's made the difference."

The company has a 10 acre site, which sounds like a fair size, but it's amazing how that can get filled, says Alexander. "Sometimes that's a good size, but when we start logging, you'd be surprised at how you can run out of space."

And when wood is available, Alexander grabs it. "When they start logging, you take all that you can, because there may be a long lull before someone is back into the big cedar that we need."

This past summer, Alexander was running the post and rail operation on a trial basis, doing de-bugging and quality control, before starting to sell product. He was hoping things would be complete

soon, but was in no rush.

"We're taking it day-by-day," he added. "I don't want to get too panicky about it." He does not want to cause problems for the operation by pushing the completion.

"Don't get me wrong—I want to sell post and rails as soon as we can because we've invested a lot of money, and I'd like to see some money coming in. But I've always been very quality focused.

"I've always said to our employees that quality comes before quantity—I want to sell a good product. If I wouldn't use it, I don't want to be selling it to someone else. The important thing is that it is working, and our numbers are starting to come up—so it's all good."

Valemount has a spectacular geographical setting, being situated between the Rocky, Monashee, and Cariboo Mountains. But it can be a challenging place to operate a business since it's some distance away from major service centres, such as Kamloops and Prince George.

"Everything is at least a day away," says Alexander. "Getting the exact part you need when that part breaks down, well, it can be painful." To account for this, he keeps a good supply of parts on hand.

Alexander still goes to the very occasional auction to look at iron, but he says that they are pretty well set up now, equipment-wise. Even though he has been fortunate to pick up pieces in the past, it can be pretty hit and miss, he says. "If I'm going to an auction for a dimensional mill, I'm not going to see very much. With the shingle, and post and rail side, it's very specialized equipment."



to page 16

# millprofile

from page 14

Often such equipment comes available through word-of-mouth.

They are also well set-up on the mobile equipment side, with three loaders, including a late-1970's era Cat 966 front end loader, equipped with a Weldco-Beales grapple, that is still going strong. "It's one of the best pieces of iron ever built," he says.

They also have a John Deere 2054, also with a Weldco-Beales grapple, and fairly new to them, a John Deere 624G with a CMS bucket.

It's clear that Alexander takes great satisfaction in seeing his mill operation approaching full productivity, after some frustrating years. Being community-minded, he also takes satisfaction in the jobs that have been created. He notes that Cedar Valley is not a huge operation, but by working with cedar, they are able to create a lot of jobs per cubic metre vs. dimensional sawmills. Walking through a modern sawmill these days, you are hard pressed to see many workers, considering how automated sawmills can be.

"Cedar is a way to create a lot of jobs—it's really hands-on," Alexander says. "We might go through only 40 metres of wood a day here, but we employ 10 people, which is pretty impressive."

He also noted that some of their products, whether it is shake blocks or shingles, are often re-manned once it reaches their customers in B.C.'s Lower Mainland.



**Truly a bonus in terms of overall wood utilization in the region is that Cedar Valley uses some pretty rough wood, with splits and cracks, to make its posts and rails. It is essentially using cedar that would not be suitable for producing shingles, or lumber, for that matter, and adding value to it.**

"The wood gets opened up and re-handled, before it goes to the end customers, so there are even more jobs created there." His father's business, for example, will take cedar and make value-added products, such as ridge caps and builder's shims.

While most of his cedar products have gone into the Fraser Valley in the past, Alexander says he will be dealing with a broker on the post and rail products.

"I don't think the Canadian market is going to be big enough to handle the post and rail, so we'll probably go with a U.S.-based broker."

Things are finally coming together for the business these days, although Alexander still has long days—and those probably won't be going away anytime soon.

But he's happy with the support, and licence, he has received from the Valemount Community Forest. "Craig Pryor, the manager of the community forest, and its board, were great," he says. "They want to see jobs created and that's what a community forest should be all about."

"I don't believe people should have to go to Alberta to find work, as they have had to in the past," he added. "There is work here. I can't hire everyone, but I can hire some people."

The goal should be to keep more of the fibre in the Valemount area, and create jobs, rather than trucking it all the way to mills in Prince George, he says.

Alexander also credits his local MLA, Shirley Bond, for helping to make things happen to access a wood supply, and the support he's received in the community.

One of the few things Alexander is now seeking for Cedar Valley is a work trailer. Like a lot of loggers and sawmillers, his pick-up truck has been his office.

"I'd like to take all the paper that's in my truck now, and move it to an office." It would also make it a bit easier for his wife, Brianne, who takes care of the marketing/office work.

"The way it is now, Brianne sometimes has to chase me around, looking for paperwork," he jokes.

"That way, too, we can move the computer from the kids' playroom at home."



## LUMBER WRAP & LUMBER COVER

From our manufacturing facility in Langley, BC, we produce a complete line of custom printed lumber wrap and custom-sewn covers, providing superior durability, and excellent tear-resistant protection.

Please come see us  
Booth #4



# LUMBER SHIELD™

PROTECTIVE WRAP

EST. 1978

Ph: 604 901-0333 • Email: [sales@lumbershield.ca](mailto:sales@lumbershield.ca)